

Cultural Programs at the 2002 Utah Winter Olympics

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February 10, 1998

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Introduction

The nice thing about the cultural program is that it is the one part of the Olympics that is not completely proscribed by the Olympic charter. It is up to the host country what they want to do. They can decide how to make their mark.

--Mitch Gershenfeld, musical producer for the 1996 Atlanta Summer Games

As the host of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, Utah has a tremendous opportunity to showcase not only the best athletic talents in the U.S. and the world, but also to demonstrate the rich tradition of arts and culture in Utah and the West.

According to the Olympic charter, the arts are to be an integral part of the celebration of the Games. Furthermore, the arts component of the Games has become, in the modern Olympics, an effective venue for showcasing the best arts and cultural traditions of the host region to a worldwide audience.

The Western United States is replete with artistic diversity and tradition, and the Utah Olympic Games provide the opportunity to celebrate the diversity and depth of arts and culture in the region and also to focus attention on the rich history and traditions of the region.

The Rationale for Including the Arts in Olympic Celebrations

Although the modern Olympics are considered primarily a contest for the world's athletes, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) mandates that, "The Olympic Movement is intended to bring together in radiant union, all the qualities of mankind which guide him toward perfection." (Rule 55 of the IOC Rules)

The Olympic charter is even more specific as to the presence of "National Fine Arts" at the Olympics, stating in Rule 34 that "The Organizing Committee shall arrange, subject to the approval of the International Committee, exhibitions and demonstrations of the national Fine Arts (Architecture, Literature, Music, Painting, Sculpture, Photography and Sport Philately) and fix the dates during which these exhibitions and demonstrations take place. The programme may also include theatrical, ballet, opera performances and symphony concerts."

It furthermore states that, "This section of the programme should be of the same high standards as the sports events and be held concurrently with them in the same vicinity.... It shall receive full recognition in the publicity released by the Organizing Committee."

The modern Olympic charge to celebrate the arts in equal measure as sport dates back to the ancient Olympic festivals in Greece. The Greek Olympics incorporated the arts as an integral part of the festival, and artists competed for the honor of having their work exhibited. Painting, sculpture and architectural exhibits struck a balance between sports and the arts that represented the Greek ideal, described by Plato in The Laws, “All youth should take ‘gymnastic’ and ‘music’ as the names for training the body and mind respectively.” (The Laws) In the spirit of Plato’s words, the Greek festivals thrived for more than a thousand years.

When the Games were revived by the Baron Pierre de Coubertin in 1896, the Games incorporated competitions with a wide variety of arts. Judges at these Olympics awarded medals in architecture, dramatic arts, choreography, letters, music, sculpture and decorations. After 1948, when more and more countries began to participate, it became increasingly difficult to judge the arts across the various cultures represented. Thus, the competitions gradually gave way to exhibitions that placed particular emphasis on the arts of the host country.

Discussion of the Use of the Arts in Recent Olympic Games

The Atlanta “Cultural Olympiad” at the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics was billed as the “largest multidisciplinary arts festival ever held in the South, with more than 25 exhibitions, 20 public art works, and 225 performances.” (Jones 64)

- The largest visual art exhibit was “Five Rings” at the High Museum, including works by more than 125 artists from Matisse’s “The Dance”, and a mask for the Japanese Noh drama, to an effigy urn from Mexico. (Jones 64)
- The musical program in Atlanta was intended to “put on a party for 2 million people, rather than emphasizing ‘high art’. It was stars, stars, stars,” according to Gershenfeld.
- The Centennial Olympic Park in downtown Atlanta was designed as a “town square”, a meeting and entertainment space for visitors. The 21-acre park contained temporary as well as permanent features, dominated by eight tall columns called Hermes Markers – the name drawn from Greek mythology. Temporary pavilions in the park were designed to create a fantasy world. “The concept was to use the building itself as entertainment,” according to the program’s lighting director of the Animated Architecture firm. Using theatrical lighting and video projections, hundreds of animated theatrical projectors created constantly changing textures and colors for the “shining building” as it was called by visitors. (Currimbhoy 8)

The 1988 Seoul Olympic Arts Festival included diverse national performers from the Korea Philharmonic Orchestra, to the National Chorus of Korea and the KBS Children’s Choir.

- In addition, the Festival showcased international performers including the Moscow State Radio and TV Choir, the Ensemble of Tokyo, the National Repertory Orchestra and the London Festival Orchestra.

Also in 1988, the Calgary Olympic Arts Festival showcased an exhibit celebrating the rich artistry of Canada's aboriginal people at the time of their early contact with Europeans. Organizers undertook a massive effort to compile more than 650 artifacts – from ceremonial masks to moccasins, canoes and clubs – from museums in Canada and private and public collections from around the world. Unfortunately, the exhibit, "The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples," was marred by legal protests from a native Mohawk group who claimed that some of the artifacts in the exhibition were stolen from their people and should be returned. (Howse, p. 54) This dispute highlights the importance of an inclusive organizational effort to represent all of the participants, as well as the artistic endeavor.

Calgary's Winter Olympic festival also featured the largest compilation of performers to date. The program included popular as well as classical music performers, a world film festival and an international authors' festival. (Young, p. 97)

Organizers of the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympics amassed work from 21 international artists, including Andy Warhol, Yozo Hamaguchi, Henry Moore, Jean-Michael Folon and David Hockney, for a pre-Olympic showing. The international touring exhibit, titled "Art and Sport," included prints and posters promoting the upcoming games. (Kaplan, p. 10) The cultural program at Sarajevo included sculpture, ballet, theater, concerts and film.

The 1980 Winter Olympic Games in Lake Placid, NY conducted an Olympic Arts Festival that focused on the creation of new, commissioned works. The works ranged from a symphony created by composer Bill Conti called the "Concerto for Chamber Orchestra," to a dance commissioned for the Pilobolus Dance Ensemble, and a play created for the Long Wharf Theatre Company.

- In addition, sculptors, muralists and other visual artists were also commissioned to create new works that became a permanent part of the Olympic facilities and the city of Lake Placid.

Although the opening ceremonies are two years away, Sydney, the host of the 2000 Summer Games, already has staged the first of four pre-Olympic festivals defining Australian culture. Notes curator James Wilson-Miller, "[The festival] was the embodiment, the pure essence of Aboriginal creation Australia-wide." (Fitzgerald 78)

- The four festivals will represent all Australian art forms, from the Sydney Theatre Company's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to the Bangarra Dance Theatre's *Fish*, celebrating artistic unity in that "all the cultural groups [in Australia] give a central place to music and dance."

- In addition to performances, the visual arts are featured in venues from New South Wales in Central Australia, to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. These exhibitions survey the work of young indigenous artists, demonstrating how their tradition is transformed through photography, installation and computer-generated imagery.

The organizers view the arts events at the Olympic festivals as “showcasing the athletes of our art industry, so to speak.” The festivals offer an opportunity to define and celebrate artistic traditions in Australia, and to encourage collaboration between non-indigenous artists and Aborigines to help redefine Australian culture. (Fitzgerald)

Critiques and Commentary Surrounding Art at Olympic Activities

Olympic Art festivals have the potential to celebrate the arts and cultural activities of the host country or region, bring a greater level of cultural awareness to the surrounding area, as well as to a worldwide audience.

The most highly regarded of the arts efforts at recent Olympics do just this. However, many of the organizers have been charged by critics as trying to do too much, or ignoring local culture for “more prestigious” works of national and/or international acclaim.

One critic summarizes the impact of the arts at several recent Olympics, compared to the perceived “commercialism” of both sport and art at the 1996 Atlanta Summer Games:

Thus have the beautiful plazas and fountains that graced the Games in Barcelona, the simple, natural beauty of Norway in midwinter, been replaced in Atlanta by a pantheon of disposable corporate monuments, totems to the [corporate] gods who are footing the bill. AT&T has constructed a Global Olympic Village. Anheuser-Busch has build a 17,300-square-foot beer garden called Bud World. An historic Atlanta skyscraper has turned itself into a giant Swatch display case. And Atlanta’s own Coca-Cola has build a 12-acre amusement park downtown called the Coca-Cola Olympic City, replete with a Coke bottle that rises to six stories and may be the most enduring image visitors take home from these architecturally-spartan Games. (Swift 18)

Rather than competing with the primarily athletic focus of the Olympics, there is general agreement that the arts activities should emphasize the arts and culture of the host region in a way that complements the activities at the Games, instead of simply adding to the chaos of the sporting events.

- After the commencement of the 1996 Atlanta Summer Games, “it became clear that a bombastic cultural program was not appropriate. [T]here is absolutely nothing in all of music – in all of art – that can compete in size, volume, scale, cost, energy, or

hoopla with the Summer Olympic Games.... What was needed was not a music program that attempted to be louder, longer, or more lavish than the Olympics, but music that exerted a calming and pacifying influence – music not on a human, not a superhuman, scale.” (Schwartz)

- The bombing of the Olympic park in Atlanta caused organizers to refocus the role of the arts at that Games, when, “Instead of opening, as planned, with the ‘silly, who-cares attitude’ of Rossini’s overture to *La Gazza Ladra*, the symphony had decided to play the soothing Bach Aria in G from the *Orchestral Suite No. 3* as a tribute to the bombing victims.” Critics noted that “It was certainly a touching and altogether appropriate gesture, and the Cultural Olympiad music events could have used far more of that kind of programming.”
- While the collected works at the “Five Rings” exhibit were impressive, critics believed “the show that best exemplifies the South’s unique contribution to art, has been relegated to a lesser space in City Hall East, a venue that’s harder to find but worth the trouble, “Souls Grown Deep.” (Jones)

Indeed the most celebrated of the Atlanta Cultural Olympiad were the two exhibitions “Souls Grown Deep: African-American Vernacular Art of the South,” and “Thornton Dial: Remembering the Road,” containing more than 300 art works by over 40 contemporary African-American artists of the Southeast. The importance of these exhibitions was taken by critics and visitors alike to be in providing a vision of the art of the Southern U.S., and having “demonstrated that the emerging visual component of this tradition is as compelling and significant as the other, more familiar, parts.” (McEvelley)

The Sydney 2000 Cultural Olympiad: A Case Study in Cultural Programs

The Cultural Olympiad that is planned for the four years preceding the 2000 Olympic Summer Games in Sydney is a case study in planning for such festivals. The Sydney Organizing Committee appointed an Executive Director of the Cultural Olympiad to begin planning the four-year effort in the summer of 1995, five years before the start of the games, and two-and-a-half years prior to the start of the first Sydney Olympic festival in 1997.

Given such a time frame, organizers were able to plan a Cultural Olympiad, to include four Olympic Art Festivals.

- I. *The Festival of the Dreaming*, held in September and October of 1997, celebrated indigenous cultures of the world, particularly Australian Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. The festival was billed as “one of the largest and most representative indigenous arts festivals yet to be held in the world, and prelude to an exploration of Australian culture in a world context.” The festival included 30 exhibitions (held at Sydney’s major galleries and museums), 14 dance and theatre productions (from classical Shakespeare plays to original

Australian works), three concerts (including the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Australian rock bands), and a number of special commissions (including a new opera, "Fish," created for the festival). In addition, the venues were complemented by street theatre and free outdoor events.

Many of the projects from *The Festival of the Dreaming* will tour nationally and internationally in 1998 and 1999.

- II. *A Sea Change*, scheduled for June-October 1998, is a celebration of artists and companies from around Australia and Oceania. The program will explore "sea changes" in Australian culture that occurred as a result of the combination of many cultures coming to Australia.
- III. *Reaching the World* presents the best of Australian art and culture to the rest of the world in November 1999 – January 2000. The touring program will reach the continents of the world that represent the five Olympic rings – Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania. During the program, Australian artists will interpret the spirit of Australia, its evolving culture and the unique nature of a strong indigenous heritage through exhibitions, performances, film, broadcast, literature and the Internet.
- IV. The pre-Olympic festivals of the Sydney games will culminate in Sydney in August – October, 2000 with *Harbour of Life*, billed as "a festival on a scale to match the grandeur of the Olympic Games. *Harbour of Life* will be the final presentation of Australian culture at the dawn of the new millennium. The theme embraces both the physical and imagined notions of harbor and the festival. The festival will continue through the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games in October, 2000. The festival activities will be concentrated around the Sydney Olympic Park.

Among the many components of the *Harbour of Life* festival will be:

- A series of outdoor concerts in Olympic venues
- A dedicated program of cultural activities to complement the Paralympic games
- A comprehensive entertainment program for the Olympic Village, including performing arts, visual arts, decorative arts, film, literature and music activities
- Involvement from the major Australian arts organizations, including theatre companies, orchestras, galleries, museums and dance companies

An important first step by organizers of the Cultural Olympiad and the Sydney Olympic games was the convening of a Multicultural Advisory Committee in December of 1996. The committee provides advice in planning, particularly as it relates to language, accommodation and cultural programs. It was formed in order to assure that ethnic communities, who played an integral role in Sydney's successful bid for the games, have a strong role in planning for the games.

In addition to the festivals of the Cultural Olympiad, organizers created a “Share the Spirit” art program for students from kindergarten to sixth grade. Students across New South Wales were eligible for artistic competitions in several categories, the work of winners will be included in the Olympic merchandising program. The president of the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games said, “We see ‘Share the Spirit’ as an ongoing process of expansion to provide all primary school students around the country with the opportunity to participate in the spirit of Olympism through art and creativity.”

Thus, the organizers of the Sydney Cultural Olympiad and Olympic games hope to create a lasting legacy from the games, both in the realm of art education and in the programs created at the four festivals that showcase the best in Australian culture.

The Advantages of Advance Programs and Planning

The Sydney Cultural Olympiad epitomizes the best of Olympic festivals, in that it allows the host country to highlight its unique talents and character in a way that the sporting events do not. Both the 1996 Atlanta and the 2000 Sydney games held cultural programs for one or two years prior to the start of the games. While this is not a requirement, there are many advantages to this approach:

- According to Atlanta Olympic planners, “Advance programs garnered media attention to the Olympic planning effort prior to the start of the games, it was the only way we could get anyone to pay attention to what we were doing before the events began. The cultural programs that were held before the games had a lot of impact on our community, in terms of visibility.”
- Advance cultural programs help to lay the groundwork for a lasting legacy from the cultural programs. By establishing that the community will support artistic and cultural performances and events without the presence of sporting events facilitates booking artists and companies, and acclimates audiences to seek out cultural programs in the community at all times, rather than simply during special events like the Olympics.
- Advance festivals provide national and international touring opportunities for the best talent in the country, as well as for emerging talent. Staging several festivals, as was done in Sydney, allows organizers to plan classical as well as cutting-edge events that appeal to the broadest possible range of audiences, and garner support for the cultural as well as the sporting portions of the Olympics.
- Regardless of when the cultural program begins, early preparation helps garner appropriate technical resources from the Olympic organizing committee. For example, it is important to be able to estimate not only the number of forums that will be included in the cultural programs, but also the kind of technical support that will

be necessary, including radio links and telecommunications infrastructure. Early estimates of technical requests are imperative in order to be able to request and obtain the appropriate resources such as those that are often provided by organizing committee personnel.

A Rationale for a Focus on the Art of the West at the Utah Winter Olympics

The arts of the West are an appropriate focus for the Utah Winter Olympics art program. The following arguments support a Western focus:

- The West is the home to distinctive art forms as well as unique Western interpretations of existing art forms. There is a singular character to the arts and their practice in the West that can be identified and shared with a global audience.
- The cultural program is the sole portion of the games that is left largely to the discretion of the host country. This makes it an appropriate and exciting opportunity to share the unique character of the place with visitors from around the world.
- Utilizing the arts of the West will help give the Winter Olympics a sense of place. The worldwide media and the blending of cultures over the past century have homogenized the cultural identity of many locales, and the opportunity to define the unique character of the West should be maximized.
- The history of the arts at the Olympics is that the programs celebrate the region in which the Games are held. Experience demonstrates that when this tradition is not honored, the art program is not as successful as it potentially could be.
- The artists of the West have been disadvantaged by living far from the primary U.S. art and media centers in the East. The Olympics will provide them with a means of addressing this geographic isolation by bringing their work into a larger focus.
- The culture of Utah can be featured in an arts program that focuses on the arts of the West. Such an approach provides an appropriate and supportive context for Utah arts and artists – a context that will build a stronger understanding for and appreciation of Utah's contribution to culture.

Scenarios for Financing the Utah Winter Olympics Cultural Program

The arts portion of the Olympic Games can be a costly undertaking; the Cultural Olympiad at the recent Atlanta Olympics cost \$25 million. Funds to support the arts program in Utah may come from the following sources.

- Corporate sponsors who have not already committed support to the sports portion of the event. (In Atlanta, sponsors included Avon, AT&T and Equifax.)

- A number of existing and emerging private foundations in the West will grow dramatically in the next several years and may find this project an appropriate use of newly-available funds. There is precedent for foundation sponsorship of large portions of the program; the Knight Foundation sponsored the Five Rings exhibit in Atlanta. (Reiss)
- Private individuals in the West and elsewhere could be asked to contribute substantial sponsorship funds. There are many individuals with a specific interest in the arts of the West.
- The state arts agencies of the West may participate financially in an arts program provided that the program offers each state adequate time to arrange for funding and a format that offers advantages and benefits to each participating state.

Frameworks for Developing an Olympic Arts Program

The manner in which the arts are incorporated into the Winter Olympics can take many forms. Some of the approaches suggested to date include the following:

- The program could concentrate on the development of exhibitions and performances that visitors to the Olympics experience in their hotels and in traveling to and from Olympic venues. The experience of previous Olympic arts programs is that visitors are reluctant to travel to a separate site to participate in an arts event. Thus, planning the arts events around visitor travel patterns is important.
- Organizers could create an advisory committee, similar to the Multicultural Advisory Committee for the Sydney games, composed of representatives from each of the Western States. While the advice of this body would be non-binding on organizers, it would provide important input into the region-specific activities of the cultural program, and help to identify artists, companies and works of significance to the West.
- Artist residencies could be encouraged throughout the state and lead up to the exhibitions and activities of the Olympics. The artists, who could be from Utah and other Western states, could be in residence throughout the state of Utah.
- The folk arts could play a central role in an arts program. Western folk arts traditions are highly varied and could anchor the arts program.
- Artists from throughout the West could be challenged and commissioned to develop and present their interpretations of the West. The resulting new creative works could form the centerpiece of an arts program.

Conclusion

The Utah Winter Olympics arts programs offer both tremendous opportunities and enormous challenges. The opportunity to present the arts of the West to an international audience has potential positive cultural, economic and educational outcomes. The key challenges that must be overcome to achieve these results are funding, program focus, and proving a program appropriate for the audience and its patterns of participation in the arts during the Games. Structuring an arts program that is sensitive to the interest and habits of this audience is perhaps the primary challenge of the entire effort.

In addition, advanced planning is a crucial component of the cultural program. The cultural program is Salt Lake City's unique opportunity to demonstrate to a world audience the character of the Western United States. However, to do so is a dramatic and time-consuming exercise. Organizers of the most successful past Olympic festivals began planning one to two years in advance of the commencement of the cultural program. This lead-time allowed them to create unified themes for the program, and to commission art and book companies that highlight the very best cultural activities that the host country has to offer.

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